

## **1. STUDY BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

This study is the first of a series of surveys that Westat will carry out to explore the views of Oklahoma residents about the changes that are taking place in a river and lake in eastern Oklahoma. The study is sponsored by the State of Oklahoma. The purpose of the study is to inform the state about the opinions of its residents about the river and lake. Researchers from several universities (the University of California, the University of Colorado, the University of Michigan, and Stanford University) and from Stratus Consulting, a research firm in Boulder, Colorado, are helping the state design the study.

The river involved is the Illinois River, and the lake is Tenkiller Lake. The Illinois River flows from Arkansas into Oklahoma. The part within Oklahoma above the lake is about 60 miles long. Tenkiller Lake is about 28 miles long. The largest city near the river and lake is the city of Tahlequah, but there are many smaller cities and towns in the area. As you may know, the Oklahoma legislature named the Illinois River a “Scenic River” during the 1970s. It is one of just six rivers in the state to be named a Scenic River.

Although the river and lake are still popular destinations for visitors, they have changed a lot over the last 50 years. The water, which used to be clear most of the time, now has much more algae in it and is often murky. The algae have become common because there are large amounts of phosphorus in the river and lake. The survey describes the situation at the river and lake and asks for people’s views about a program that would reduce the effects of the phosphorus in the water. You’ll be asking people to vote for or against this program.

This survey is different from many other surveys you may have worked on in the past. You will give a lot of information to respondents about the river and lake, about the condition of the water, about the fish that live in the river and lake, and about a program to reduce the effects of the phosphorus on the river and lake. You’ll read this information to the respondents, and it is very important that you read the information slowly and clearly and in a neutral way, exactly as it is written. Much of the information is illustrated or summarized on

show cards. The purpose of all the information is to let people make up their own minds about the program – it's important to avoid pushing people to vote for or against the program.

The questionnaire has been tested with hundreds of respondents already, but none of this testing has been in respondents' homes. The research team is very interested in learning how long the questionnaire takes, in how respondents react to it, in their answers to the questions, and in your feedback about the questionnaire. When you do the interviewing, please write notes of any questions or procedures that seem to work well and ones that did not work so well so you can tell the study team later.

## **1.2 The Research Team**

There are several prominent researchers involved in this study. Stratus Consulting has the responsibility for designing the study. Rich Bishop and David Chapman lead the research team at Stratus. They will both be attending the training. Besides the researchers at Stratus, several other researchers have been helping to design the study and develop the questionnaire. They include:

- Michael Hanemann, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley;
- Jon Krosnick, a survey researcher from Stanford University;
- Edward Morey, an economist from the University of California;
- Roger Tourangeau, a survey researcher from the University of Michigan.

Along with Rich Bishop and David Chapman, Jon Krosnick and Roger Tourangeau will also be attending the training to help answer any questions you might have about the study or the questionnaire.

As you know, Westat is responsible for collecting the survey data for this study. The Westat effort is headed by Mike Shea and Sherry Sanborne. Welcome aboard the study!